

December 2008 Issue No. 12

Good News Unlimited

GOD WITH US

CHRISTMAS:
A TIME TO
REBUILD FAITH

BUT DO YOU
NOT REALISE ...

GOD IS MOVING
IN THE LAND OF ABRAHAM

VISION 5015
THE FALL OF BABYLON

Published by Good News Unlimited
www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au



EDITORIAL

Before the first advent, God had always appeared distant and remote. Even though his presence was manifested in the Most Holy Place of the Sanctuary right up until the Babylonian captivity, he was not accessible to the average person—in fact, not even to the Levitical priests.

Then, for more than half a millennium after Solomon's Temple had been destroyed by the Chaldeans, there was no evidence of God's visible presence on Earth at all.

The prophecies had declared, however, that the day would come when God would dwell among his people and walk among them (Lev. 26:11). The faithful clung to those precious promises, believing that the day would come when God would do what he said he would do. And 'in the fullness of time' he did.

The very first Christmas re-

vealed the face of God—it was a human face. 'When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human he stayed human' (Philip. 2:6-7 MB).

One name that God chose for himself was a name that would signify his relationship with us; it was 'Immanuel', God with us. He lived among us and walked our streets and roads with the common people.

We were inextricably drawn to him. There was something about him that was powerfully magnetic, a strength that did not repel, because it was the strength of love. A love that put us first; a love that didn't exalt itself over us; a love that didn't force itself on us; a love that never kept score of our sins; a love that always looked for the best in us; a love that never gave up on us. We could not resist that kind of love. That new beginning for God was also a new beginning for us.

God became man so he could dwell in our midst. Even where only two or three gather together in his name he is there in the midst of them. But God wanted to do even more than that; he wanted to dwell in the midst of each one of us, individually. Not only is the church a dwelling place for God (1 Cor. 3:16), so is each believer (1 Cor 6:16; 2 Cor. 13:5).

Humanly speaking, God was

'born again' when Divinity became one with humanity in Bethlehem two millennia ago. We, likewise, are 'born again' when Divinity becomes one with our humanity—when God comes to dwell inside each one of us. He comes in with his forgiveness for all our sins and with the gift of his righteousness.

Christmastime is the time when we exchange gifts, and the only gift the Lord asks of you and me is our sinfulness. If we give it to him he will fill our emptiness by coming to dwell in us, bringing with him the gift of his perfect righteousness—the righteousness that guarantees us a place with him in eternity. That is the good news—the good news that is unlimited in its scope and unlimited in its power to save.

And while we are talking about giving, we at *Good News Unlimited* want to thank you, our readers, who have so generously supported our ministry this year. We have been awed by your generosity, a generosity that has enabled us to expand our ministry and fulfil some of our dreams for outreach. God bless every one of you in the coming year. You are dear to our hearts and our prayers are for you and your needs, as we hope your prayers are for us and our needs.

Ritchie Way.

Good News Unlimited is published monthly by Good News Unlimited Ltd., PO Box 6788 (Unit 2/ 54-60 Industry Dr.) Sth. Tweed Heads NSW 2486.

Phone:(07) 55245040

Facsimile:(07) 55245900

Executive Editor:Pastor Ritchie Way

Layout & Design:Patricia Tedman

Proof Reader:Lionel Hartley

Printer:Eagle Print E. Victoria Park WA.

Good News Unlimited is an evangelical, nondenominational, nonprofit organization, with headquarters at South Tweed Heads, in New South Wales. GNU is dedicated to proclaiming the Everlasting Gospel.

GNU is not a church, nor is it affiliated organically with any Christian denomination. Its ministry includes radio presentations, preaching appointments, public seminars and the dispersal of audio and video cassettes, also literature emphasizing the atonement of Christ.

GNU is supported solely by donations from those who believe in its ministries. Gifts are tax deductible in Canada, New Zealand and the USA. Unsolicited manuscripts of interest to Christians of all denominations are wel-

come, but without guarantee of return. Under certain circumstances, payment may be made for manuscripts at the Editor's discretion.

Please send typed manuscripts, CD Rom or 3 1/2" disks (MAC or IBM) Word, Wordperfect or text-only format to: Executive Editor, R Way, PO Box 6788 Sth Tweed Heads NSW 2486.

GNU BOARD

Elénne Ford.....(07) 32361690

Rob Harris(02) 66283501

Bruce Johansen(03) 53811330

Douglas Martin.....(02) 66281984

William Sinclair(08) 94585469

Bruce Starr(02) 98721016

Ritchie Way00116494822543

GNU ADMINISTRATION AUSTRALIA:

admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Pastor: ron@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Magazine: ritchiew@kiwilink.co.nz

Accounts/orders: carolyn@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Secretary/Treasurer: dennis@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Chairman: spider55@three.com.au

GNU USA: gnu@goodnewsunlimited.org **GNU Website design:** ray@yabbagold.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without permission in writing from the publisher.

GNU Exec. Editor:0011 649 4822543

Fax:0015 649 4822544

GNU Printer: ...Ph./fax: (08) 93615690

GNU USA:.....0011 1 5308239690

GNU Treasurer:.....0413128080

Book & Tapes:.....(07) 55245040

Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all, meaning and direction in their lives by a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.

Email





You may be certain of this; that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day Jesus returns. —Philippians 1:6

GOD WITH US

Ritchie Way

CERTAINTY

There are lots of things in this world that you can't be certain of—the security of the Stock Market, Mortgage Interest rates, or even the length of your life.

On 25th September, 2008, Austin Hemmings, forty-four, a fine Christian man, was leaving his Auckland downtown workplace when a woman he didn't know, who was being accosted by a male, begged him to help her. When Austin stepped forward he was stabbed in the chest and died a few minutes later.

None of us know for certain whether we will ever get back into the bed we got out of in the morning, or whether we'll ever get out of the bed we got into the night before. None of us know for certain whether the Investment Company or Bank that has our money will still be operating tomorrow, or whether the weather will favour our endeavours this year.

Paul tells us, however, that there is one thing we *can* be certain of: 'He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day Jesus returns.' *That's God's promise.*

When God plants a seed in your life, regardless of your external circumstances, regardless of your health, financial status or your relationships, his Spirit will water that seed and nurture the life that it bears, until the day Jesus comes back. That's his promise. With your co-operation it *will* be fulfilled.

THE BEGINNING

The world had a beginning and everything in it

has a beginning. People begin as babies; each city began with a small settlement; NASA's mission to land a man on the moon had a beginning; and even the Olympic Games had a beginning.

There was also a time when God 'began a good work in you'. Do you remember that time? Cast your mind back to the first stirrings of the Spirit in your heart, when the seed of eternal life was planted in your life. That, for you, was the best of all beginnings.

When I was just six, I clearly remember the fine winter, moonless night when my parents took me to a function in town. Because my mother always had me in bed early, this was the latest I had ever stayed up. The cloudless sky was inky black and the great wheel of the Milky Way spangled the heavens with a glory I had no idea existed. I was filled with wonder and awe at the splendid sight—a sight which seemed perfectly natural and friendly, yet awesomely inspiring. With my head back and eyes riveted on the sky, I followed my parents in a daze uttering words of wonder and amazement.

So it is when we first allow God to come into our lives. Everything is fresh and wonderful; we are in awe and joy fills the soul. This is the very beginning of the good work that God does in us. God's glory lights up the darkness and the positives outweigh the negatives.

We see the wonders of his hand and are humbled by their grandeur. Above all, it is not the darkness that now has our attention, but the beauty of God's ways. Instead of obscurity we behold order and purpose. There is a God who cares for us—a God greater than all our troubles.



THE PROCESS

The railway line that runs through rugged bush country between Stratford and Taumarunui in New Zealand's North Island has twenty-four tunnels. Tunnel number eight, at Tangarakau, was particularly difficult to bore through. Just forty metres or so from the entrance, the drillers came across a river of liquid papa (ancient sea mud) that poured into their excavation. They had no choice but to seal it off and bypass it by changing the direction of the tunnel. Of all the tunnels on the line, this is the only one with a bend in it.

So too, in our Christian lives, there may be diversions. One thing is never changed, however, and that is our terminus. We cannot, we dare not make our destination anything other than Jesus. There is nothing sadder than reaching our objective only to find it was the wrong objective. But nobody who makes Christ his goal will be disappointed. Jesus was Paul's goal. He wrote:

'I'm not saying that I have this altogether, that I have it made. But I am well on my way, reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me. Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal, where God is beckoning us onward—to Jesus. I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back. So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision—you'll see it yet! Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it' (Phil. 3:12-16 MB).

God not only started the work within us, he will carry it on to the very end. He is the one who not only gives the motivation to do what is right; he also gives the energy to do it. So 'That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure' (Phil 2:12-13 MB). God's purpose is to bring us to himself. Don't frustrate that purpose—ever!

THE RESULT

What changes can we expect God to make in us in this life? Bob Gass, author of the much loved


daily devotional, *Word for Today*, wrote:

'Mary Magdalene was a known prostitute. But after Christ redeemed her she became one of the last people to leave the cross (See Matt. 27:55-61) and one of the first to discover and announce his resurrection (See Matt. 28:7). Because she embraced Christ and the future he offers all of us, she's been mentioned with honour by every ensuing generation.

Peter was a fisherman with a hair-trigger temper and some anti-social tendencies. Yet God filled him with so much Spiritual power that when he preached, multitudes came to Christ (See Acts 2:40-41). Jacob lived up to his name 'deceiver'. But God gave him an extreme makeover and changed his name to Israel, which means 'A Prince with God' (See Gen. 32:24-30). Ruth was a Moabitess who grew up worshipping idols—not a promising start. But after turning to serve the true God she became part of the ancestry of King David and our Lord Jesus (See Matt. 1:5). Zacchaeus, a well-known embezzler, hosted Jesus overnight in his home and ended up becoming a philanthropist.

And how about Paul? Killing Christians didn't put him off limits to God. As an apostle he wrote over half of the New Testament by divine revelation '... and when aprons and handkerchiefs taken from his body were placed on the sick they were healed' (See Acts 19:11-12). Now if God could do that for 'people with a past', he can give you a new beginning too!

THE END

Every journey has both a beginning and an end. We have begun the journey in glory; day by day we are walking in glory and we shall finish in glory. But the glory at the conclusion of our journey will be like no other glory. Just as the end of the Prodigal's journey was the Father's house, so will be the end of our journey. We shall be with the Father, and we shall see Jesus face to face. That will be the consummation of the experience 'God with us.' It was inaugurated that first Christmas, it is fulfilled in us and it will be consummated when we are all ushered by the holy angels into God's presence at the beginning of eternity. If that is your hope, always remember that 'Christ in you [is] the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27). 

RIDDLE



Three times now I've been divided, doing just what the Lord decided.
Twice a garment was the tool, that led me to obey God's rule.
Once the ark stood in my place, once God's Son I did embrace.
Never have I walked the ground, nor in the heavens was I found.

What am I?

(answer page 19)



THANK YOU FOR
ANONYMOUS TITHE
& DONATIONS IN
NOVEMBER: \$100.00
AND \$30.00

It is really awesome what the Lord is doing in Nigeria, with the vision of *The Nigeria Evangelical Missionary Association* (NEMA) to mobilize, train and also send fifty thousand Nigerians in fifteen years [5015] as gospel bearers to core Northern Nigeria, Africa and the Arab Peninsula then 'back to Jerusalem', through its *Vision5015*.

This is contained in a statement by the Association's Executive Secretary, Rev. Timothy Olonade in its Jos headquarters, adding that more than one hundred top missions' leaders, representing eighty agencies, churches and organizations that are actively sending missionaries from Nigeria have affirmed this vision. He stated that *Vision5015* is indeed a bold step for the Nigerian church, which is dealing with its own Islamic, anti-Christian northern territory, pointing out there is unanimity in the Church that the time has come to march the gospel to places that have not heard.

Olonade further said that NEMA is prompted to pursue this set vision, considering the fact that about 321,210,890 people from Northern Nigeria, North Africa through the Arabian Peninsula are yet to hear the gospel, and that the Association is convinced that this is the time for the Nigerian people, churches and agencies to come together to make sure that the remaining task is accomplished through *Vision5015*.

'The Church in Nigeria is being sensitized to release her best fifty thousand youths in the next fifteen years to take the gospel back to Jerusalem. In partial completion of the task, our training arm, *Nigerian Evangelical Mission Institute* (NEMI) has introduced the *Training of Trainers* (TOT) program, which is geared towards providing both initial training and on-going education,' he added.

According to Olonade: 'To meet the task, more qualified and experienced manpower is needed. Also needed is a regular flow of support for administrative

Vision5015

Kanayo Uchime


operations; materials, books, training equipment and computers.' He opined that NEMA as a coalition of ninety-five churches and missions organizations working among 250 unreached people groups in fifty-six countries with 5,200 Nigerian missionaries around the world has been positioned by God, to help the Nigerian church fulfill her mandate to reach the world.

The Executive Secretary stated that as a multi-ministry platform which provides training, resources and logistic support for member agencies and churches in Nigeria for fruitful, effective and efficient outreaches, NEMA seeks synergistic alliances to advance missions in and out of Nigeria.

'And as a rallying point for missionary-sending churches in Nigeria, NEMA will continue to need the involvement of all Nigerian churches towards its leadership/manpower development growth, joint research projects, resource sharing and provision of culturally appropriate evangelism and discipleship insights. Together, we endeavor to facilitate strategic partnership and alliance across denominational divides with Pentecostals, Evangelicals, mainline and independent denominations to ensure the gospel gets to the unreached peoples in Nigeria and Africa,' Olonade said.

NEMA is a networking association and fellowship forum for the missions' movement in Nigeria, comprising of mission agencies, organizations and churches who come together under one umbrella to foster the work of missions in Nigeria. It assists and empowers mission agencies and mission-sending churches in the proclamation of the gospel and the making of disciples among all peoples, languages and geographical areas in Nigeria, Africa and beyond. They help to initiate strategic partnership among members to share ministry resources, information and training, including, faith-based specialized/holistic training and other related matters.

Also NEMA exists to mobilize, assist and equip the Nigerian Church and the missions' movement to a higher level of efficiency and effectiveness in the preaching of the gospel and discipleship. And it pursues the unity in ministry, upholds evangelical truth and principles as evident in all its leadership development programs.

For more log on to www.nematoday.org 

—Used with permission of ASSIST News Service.

STANDING IN THE

Good News Unlimited is supported by a group of people committed to praying for the needs of our readers. If you have a prayer request please share it with Carolyn at the office. You don't have to be specific if you wish to keep the matter private. Your request will then be passed on to a group of intercessors who will take it to the Lord on your behalf. They would be honoured to support you in this way.

Phone: 07 5524 5040 Fax: 07 5524 5900

Email: admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au

Mail: PO Box 6788 Sth Tweed Heads

NSW 2486 Australia

NEED OF PRAYER.....



CHRISTMAS:

A TIME TO REBUILD FAITH

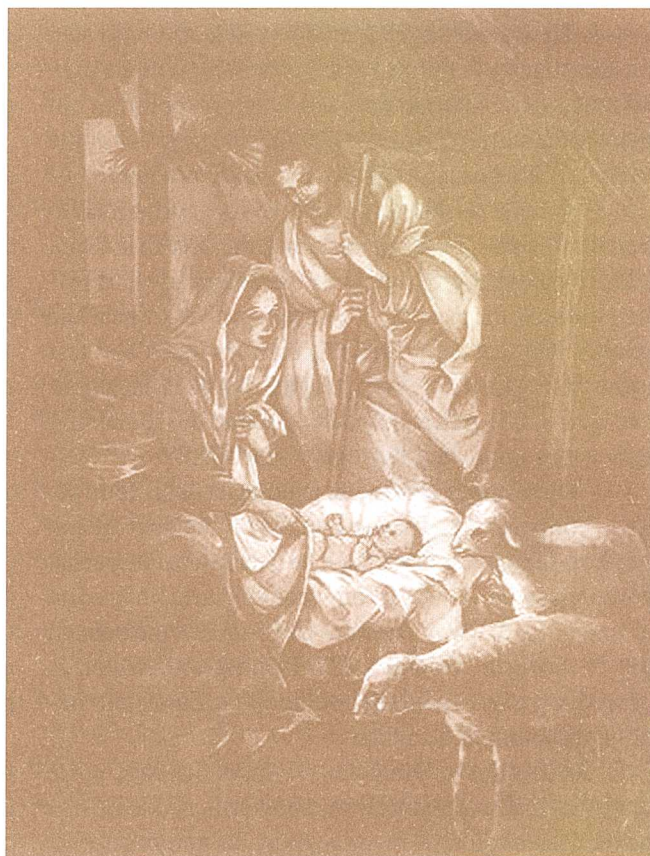
Calvin W. Edwards

With his distinctively pungent prose, Malcolm Muggeridge commented on Christmas:

'It has been celebrated year by year through the centuries of Christendom, in carols, in crèches, in plays and processions, in a combination of public worship and private acts of giving, until now, when faith seems to be expiring and the light has grown correspondingly dim, it has become a mighty exercise in salesmanship, a gala occasion in the great contemporary cult of consumption, an act of worship directed towards our latest deity—the Gross National Product.' (*Jesus: The Man Who Lives*, p. 26).

It is true that the wise men from the East probably wouldn't recognise what we have made of their example in giving gifts. Nor would Mary and Joseph see any connection between the lavish foods we indulge in at this festive season and the humble fare they carried with them from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And the tinsel decor with which we adorn our homes, would have found no parallel in the crude stable, which was the birth place of the Christ child.

Perhaps none of these modern variations on old Christmas themes are bad, for there is hardly any moral issue at stake with the decorating of a small pine tree in one's living room. But the danger in the gala we have made of Christmas, is that we forget its original meaning. That somehow the presents we receive loom larger than the greatest Present we have ever received. That the excitement of sharing and fellowship with friends and family outdoes the thrill of the fact, that God has entered this world in the form of a baby boy. That the pleasures of the palate we indulge in at Christmas are more meaningful than the Bread of Life which satisfies all hunger. And so the question must arise, what does Christmas mean? What does it tell us?



THE BIRTH

Christmas, of course, means that Jesus was born. Born in a humble stable, tended by a loving mother at whose breast he sucked, accompanied by a somewhat relieved Joseph, and in the presence of a handful of domestic animals. The parents were away from home. As foreign subjects of the Roman Empire, which stretched its tyrannical tentacles even into the Promised Land, they were fulfilling the command of Herod to register at their place of birth. There was no room in the main centres of lodging, so despite Mary's condition, they were allocated a place among the animals in the barn. Thus the wayfaring mother gives birth to her tiny infant in the humblest of settings and he lies cradled by straw intended for animals.

For many, Christmas means little more than this,

and for many more it probably means a great deal less. But I would urge that to reduce Christmas to the bare essentials would be a great tragedy. Christmas should be an occasion that is rich and meaningful to every Christian. Why settle for a barren rose cutting which, when planted, will bloom into a glorious flower? To plumb some of the depths of Christmas we must ask the more penetrating question, not, what happened, but, what is the meaning of what happened?

JESUS' HUMILIATION

Have our sensitivities been hardened to the fact that baby Jesus was God incarnate? What a thing for the God of the universe to do! In being born as a small child, the Creator became the created. He who ruled the universe, became governed by the rules of the universe. The King of the cosmos, became a subject of a puppet king in an obscure and turbulent nation. He who created life, found himself under a death decree. The almighty Monarch, who in heaven above was surrounded by unimaginable translucent light, was born on a dark night in the blackness of a stable. The One who had heard the magnificent harmonies of the best-trained choirs in the universe sing him praises, now cried with the helplessness of a babe, only to be accompanied by the earthy sounds of farm life. He who lit the sun and rolled it out into space, then spun the planets off in their courses around it, inhabited one of these massive lumps of dirt as a tiny bundle of flesh. Oh the marvel of the humiliation of a God who

would do such a thing!

In a well-known early Christian hymn this thought was recorded and meditated upon: 'Christ Jesus . . . though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross' (Philip. 2:5-8).

Christmas reminds us that God humbled himself. He forsook the things of heaven for our sake. He left the glory of the courts above for the slander and abuse of worldly courts.

Friends, shouldn't this be of great encouragement to us this Christmas? This season reminds us that our God is one who has given all, who has not simply told us of his favour for us, but who forsook all in his demonstration of his total love. We can be assured that if God would do this, he will abundantly give us all we need. Expectations of gifts from wealthy friends this season pale in significance beside the gifts that God has in mind for us.

JESUS' IDENTIFICATION WITH HUMANITY

God is not some supremely sublime, abstract being—or maybe a type of power or force indescribable in human categories—he has identified himself with humanity. He didn't come as a slightly inferior form of human being, something between ape and man, to demonstrate the lengths to which he would condescend. He didn't come as one slightly superior,

Good News Unlimited

Saturday Bible School 9.30am

at the GNU office, 2/54-60 Industry Dr.,
South Tweed Heads NSW

Morning tea will be provided.

Please bring your Bible

Dates for Next Meetings:

(No Meetings for January)

February 7th and 21st

March 14th

Narellan, Sydney Focus for Life Christian Fellowship

Those living in or near Narellan are warmly invited to meet for Bible study and fellowship in the Salvation Army Worship Centre on the corner of Exchange Parade and Narellan Road in Narellan, every Saturday at 1:30pm. For further information, contact Pastor Santo Calarco on phone number: 0404 029822

*Dr Ford Live on Broadband at
Peachester meetings 2nd and
4th Saturdays of the Month
2.30pm-4.00pm*

<http://live.yahoo.com/desmondford>

The link is on Youtube Channel page
with times as well.

<http://au.youtube.com/user/pangear>



something between man and angel, to remind us eternally that he was greater than man. No, wonder of wonders, God in Jesus, came as one of us! As human. Even as a babe.

This was what Matthew was stressing when he reminded his readers of Isaiah's prophecy: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel' (Matt. 1:23). 'Emmanuel' means 'God is with us.' But definitional equations cannot come near to capturing the significance of the fact encapsulated here. God is with us. He has identified with us. The gap has been closed. He is not remote. He is not an ideal towards which we endlessly strive. He is not a state of peaceful non-existence into which we merge by certain religious disciplines. God is not something to be discovered. He has entered this world. He could be seen, touched and heard. He was, and is with us. The crude stable in Bethlehem was never before host to such an important guest, for the Jesus who was born there was also God.

It was this glorious theme that the writer of Hebrews used to encourage his Christian friends of failing faith: 'Let us hold fast our confession. For we have not an high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sinning. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb. 4:14-16).

Our God is a sympathetic God, one who knows what it means to live amidst the threatening realities of a sinful planet. This Christmas we may be assured that God has identified with us, and having done that, we may truly know what he is like and be confident that he understands our every need.

JESUS' INCARNATION

Despite its elusiveness and the great tomes which have been written on the incarnation, surely this is the central happening in that Bethlehem stable. That which occurred at the direction of God, without fuss or fanfare, has baffled the most august church councils and challenged the greatest minds. There is no question that this feature of Christianity is unique. Other religions propose men who become gods, or gods who act as men, but not men who are God. This bold claim of Christianity sets it apart.

The Jesus of history was, or rather is, the Christ who is God. It is by the incarnation that we know God. It '... has supremely revealed God, shown him to us in a new and illuminating light, put a fresh meaning into the very word that is his name' (D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, p. 119).



And it shows us how God works. He has chosen to operate in this world 'incarnationally'—by becoming involved; sympathising; sharing and bearing common burdens. God actually knows what it's like to have tears of sadness trickle down his face. God is not like the operator of a machine, pressing buttons, checking gauges, refuelling, etc. Nor is his involvement in this world a kind of all pervading presence which seeps through everything, sanctifying even evil itself.

The incarnation brings God into this world at a particular time and place—and this is the way, I believe, he works in our lives and the world. He is not a remote source of impersonal commands, not a 'power' that emanates from a 'centre' which randomly reorganises natural law into a haphazard world, where miracle is the rule rather than the exception.

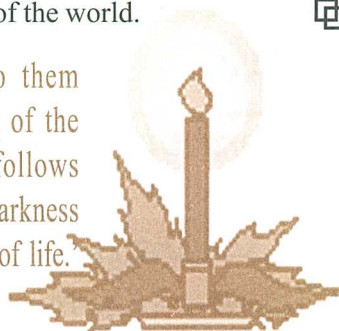
The incarnation tells us that God unites with humankind to bring about his purposes. God is vitally concerned with his creation. He will, and does, enter it to bring about restoration. This Christmas our faith may be renewed in the reality of God's involvement in this world. In the incarnation, he has committed himself to humanity and shown us how he operates in our world. The Christ-child speaks to us of the God who is man and the man who is God.

CONCLUSION

Maybe Christmas can be more than presents, food, Santas and frivolity. Maybe it can be more than the cute story of a Great Man who started out in such unimposing circumstances. Maybe Christmas, because of what it stands for, can be a time of rebuilding faith—faith in the God who humbled himself for us, who identified with us, indeed, who became one of us.

The Christmas light still shines. He who was born as a helpless babe and lived and died on our behalf, this God who was man, rose from the dead and lives again. The light has come into the world and it shines on. This Christmas we could be bedazzled by the bright lights of the cities, or by the flickering glow of our windows at home, but how much better if we could again catch a glimpse of Him who is the light of the world. □

Then Jesus spoke to them again, 'I am the light of the world, the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.'
John 8:12 (ML)



An overview of the GOOD NEWS UNLIMITED **New Zealand**
Seminar held on the 15th November 2008

THIS I BELIEVE

Ritchie Way

The Board of the New Zealand branch of GNU decided that, as it had been several years since GNU had hosted a seminar in New Zealand, we should ask Dr. Ford if he would come to our fair country to preach the basics of the gospel for the first time to many young people and reinforce it among older GNU folk. He agreed to come on November 15, after his return from the United States and Canada, and other commitments in Australia.

We hired the Performing Arts Centre at the new Albany Junior High School in greater Auckland, and Gracegate, the Church of the GNU Board members, organised the music, worship leading, children's group, ushering and food for the day.

We had a wonderful seminar assisted by beautiful weather. About one hundred and thirty adults attended, not counting children and their teachers who held their meeting in the Atrium.

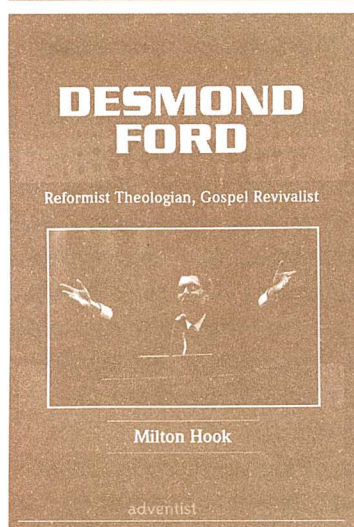
Some folk drove six hours to attend the Conference, and many drove more than two hours. We had a first class group of musicians and singers from Gracegate, who provided an inspiring worship service to start the seminar. The worship was so powerful some folk told me later they were close to tears.

About two-dozen thought-provoking questions were handed in for Des to answer, and he was at his consummate best—as he was in his preaching. I was pleased to hear some of the younger generation saying how much his message appealed to them and helped them in their relationship with the Lord.

We took several cartons of books along—some given freely by Des and Gillian Ford—they sold well and we came home with just one and a half cartons left.

Our Hospitality Team put on a great lunch for folk who came without food, and people enjoyed sitting outside in the sunshine to eat. We initially thought the two-hour break between the morning and afternoon sessions might have been too long, but it proved to be just right, as folk said it gave them a chance to catch up, as it had been several years since our last Conference.

In all, it was a great day. I didn't hear a single word of complaint, but many of praise. A very big 'Thank you' to Dr. Ford, Carolyn at the Australian GNU office, Dr. Fraser and Kylie Burling who cared for book sales and finances, and Gracegate Church for a wonderful and memorable day. □



Biography by Dr Milton Hook

Desmond Ford Reformist Theologian, Gospel Revivalist

As a history of ideas, this is an exceptional volume. Dr Hook is a competent historian who has struggled for decades to understand complex issues, which he treats in a fast-paced, scintillating style. While Dr Ford is mentioned in every chapter, the book is also a panorama depicting the development of Adventist thought.

—Dr Arthur Patrick, Honorary Senior Research Fellow, Avondale College.

Published by
Adventist Today USA

400pp

#1DBH001 **\$26.00** (Soft Cover)

#1DBH002 **\$36.00** (Hard Cover)
\$7.00 Aust. & \$10.00 overseas PP&H



DANIEL 5:

THE FALL OF BABYLON

*Part seven in a series on
Daniel & Revelation*

Angus McPhee

Significant in the history of God's people was the fall of Babylon. It was foreseen by Isaiah (14:3-23; 21:9), said to be inevitable by Jeremiah (51:8, 49), and was the hope of the Jewish exiles (Psalm 137). Of interest to students of eschatology is its echo in Revelation 14:8; 18:2. But our understanding of biblical prophecy written in that Apocalyptic style of writing, is improved when we know the historical realities from which its concepts were drawn.

Just as the fall of Babylon in the days of Daniel (539 B.C.) was a great relief to God's people, so will the fall of end-time Babylon be a great relief to faithful believers in the last generation. So, let's see how that great city fell—and why. In this connection, Daniel 5 is a valuable document, for right here is a description, by a contemporary, of the events in the city the night of its fall. And right here are warnings for endtime Babylon.

Cuneiform documents from Daniel's time reveal that Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, had 'entrusted the kingship' to his eldest son, Belshazzar, who reigned as coregent with his father. After Nabonidus had cap-



tured Tema in northern Arabia, he rebuilt it and stayed there for the rest of his days. So on the night of the invasion of the city of Babylon by the Persian army, Belshazzar was the one upon the throne there¹. Daniel was there too, by now an old man in his early eighties.

SO, WHAT HAPPENED?

Let's consider the military strategy first, which Daniel doesn't mention. Imagine a somewhat rectangular walled city with a river flowing through it. A bridge connects the enclosed city on the right bank, with the enclosed city on the left bank. If the water level is lowered, an invasion just might be possible via the river-bed and then up the banks and through the riverside gates. Xenophon, a Greek historian, essayist, and soldier, who lived in the following century, tells how Cyrus, king of the invading Persians, captured Babylon:

*'At last the ditches were completed. Then, when he heard that a certain festival had come round ... during which all Babylon was accustomed to drink and revel all night long, Cyrus took a large number of men just as soon as it was dark, and opened up the heads of the trenches at the river. As soon as that was done, the water flowed down through the ditches in the night, and the bed of the river, where it traversed the city, became passable for men ... '*²

The Greek historian, Herodotus, relates that on that night the city gates along the Euphrates had not been closed. A festival was in progress and people



were to be permitted to cross the river at will:

'He [Cyrus] posted his army at the place where the river enters the city and another part of it, where the stream issues from the city, and bade his men enter the city by the channel of the Euphrates when they should see it to be fordable. Having so arrayed them and given this command, he himself marched away with [others] of his army. ... When he came to the [marsh], [he drew] off the river by a canal into [it, thus making the river fordable]. [The other soldiers then] made their way into Babylon by the channel of the Euphrates, which had now sunk about to the height of the middle of a man's thigh. ... As it was, the Persians were upon [the Babylonians] unawares. ... the dwellers in the middle of the city knew nothing of it; all this time they were dancing and making merry at a festival ... ' ³

DANIEL'S DESCRIPTION OF EVENTS

'King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for one thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. While he was drinking, he gave orders for the gold and silver goblets [captured] from the temple in Jerusalem⁴, to be brought in so that he, his nobles, his wives and concubines might drink from them. This was done. While they were all drinking, they praised the gods of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.'

In a few words the Scriptures have described the character of Babylon. Here is the pattern of behaviour that one day will be copied by Babylon the Great, the endtime spiritual Babylon whose end is foretold in the Revelation. If you are searching for the identity of endtime Babylon and the reasons for its fall, here is the prototype; this is the Scripture interpreting itself.

Here we find:

- * A sense of false security—based on the strength of the city's fortifications and defenses rather than on God.
- * Oppression of the people of God.
- * Contempt for the things of God.
- * Immorality, hedonism, materialism i.e. all that matters is what they can touch, taste, hear, see and smell.
- * An obsession with the occult.

'In the Revelation, Babylon stands as a symbol of opposition against Christ and his followers' (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:18).⁵

This is man without God; man against God.

THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL!

In the midst of their revelry a spectral hand appeared and wrote on the wall near the lamp-stand. The king, eyes riveted to the writing hand, went pale

with fear and collapsed. When the hand disappeared, leaving behind some mysterious words, he called out for the seers to be brought in and promised, 'Anyone who can read and interpret this writing will be promoted to third highest ruler in the kingdom [i.e. after Nabonidus and himself].' The seers entered, but none could, or dare explain, the writing. Belshazzar was beside himself, and his nobles were baffled.

The queen, hearing the terrified voices of the king and his nobles, entered the banqueting hall and suggested that Belshazzar 'consult Daniel, whom Nebuchadnezzar had once appointed chief of the magicians.' She saw Daniel as a person with both a keen mind and the ability to solve difficult problems. So Daniel was brought before the king who told him that he had heard of him and his reputation and that he would be rewarded if he could read and interpret the writing.

Daniel responded: 'Keep your gifts, and give your rewards to someone else. Even so, I will read and explain the writing for you:

'God gave Nebuchadnezzar his position and splendour. So he was feared by all. He wielded the power to execute people and to spare lives, to promote and to humble. But when he became arrogant and hardened, he was deposed, stripped of his glory and was driven from civilization and given the mind of an animal, living with wild donkeys and eating grass. His body was wet with dew until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and sets over them anyone he wishes.

But you, Belshazzar, his descendant,⁶ have not humbled yourself, even though you knew all this. Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You used the vessels from his temple for your own pleasure. You praised manufactured gods that are blind, deaf and mindless. But you did not honour the God who holds in his hand both your life and your ways. For that reason, he has sent the hand that wrote the inscription.'

Centuries later, George Santayana wrote a maxim that reflected Daniel's judgement: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'

IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

The inscription written by the ghostly hand read, 'MENE, MENE, TEKEL, [U]PARSIN.' The literal translation of these words is: 'Numbered (or, counted), weighed, (and) pieces.' Daniel could have just said, 'Your kingdom is broken into pieces.' However, the singular form of that last word means 'share.' In addition, the consonants in this word are the very same



for the Aramaic words for 'Persia' and 'Persians'!

So Daniel declares under inspiration: 'Mene', God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. 'Tekel', you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting. 'Peres', your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.

We have discovered from Herodotus and Xenophon *how* Babylon fell. The question remains, *Why* did Babylon fall? The answer is found in the 'Tekel', you have been weighed on the scales and found wanting—deficient. Belshazzar lacked moral worth. In spite of what God had done in the courts of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, compassion, moral fibre, purity and faith in the true God, were lacking in the current king.

Even so, true to his word, Belshazzar proclaims Daniel the third highest ruler in the kingdom. It was too late for Belshazzar, though. In the words of Edwin Arnold:

'That night they slew him on his father's throne,
The deed unnoticed and the hand unknown;
Crownless and sceptreless Belshazzar lay,
A robe of purple round a form of clay.'

ISAIAH'S PREDICTION COMES TRUE

Some years before the prophet Isaiah had written:

'On the day the Lord gives you relief ... you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has come to an end! How his

fury has ended! ... You are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit. Those who see you stare at you, they ponder your fate: "Is this the man who shook the earth and made kingdoms tremble, the man who made the world a desert, who overthrew its cities and would not let his captives go home?"' (14:3-17).

The fall of Babylon and the fate of its last ruler is history we should never forget.

We ourselves might be living in spiritual Babylon—marked by its false sense of security, persecution of the people of God, utter contempt for the things of God, immorality, hedonism, and materialism—but we can choose to have no part in it, for Christians are subjects, not of the king of spiritual Babylon, but of Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords. The fate of Babylon and its ruler need not be a history that we are doomed to repeat. ☐

Endnotes:

1. Horn, Siegfried H. *SDA Bible Dictionary* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1979).
2. Neufeld, Don F., *SDA Bible Student's Source Book*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association) 1962. Article 548.
3. Neufeld, *op. cit.* Article 549.
4. 2 Chronicles 36:7, 18; Daniel 1:2.
5. Horn, *op. cit.* Article Babylon.
6. According to Semitic usage 'father' frequently stood for 'grandfather' or 'ancestor.' See Horn, *op. cit.* Article Father.

A SAVIOUR FOREKNOWN

Topics include:

- * *How to Understand the Old Testament Prophets*
- * *Jeremiah and Ezekiel*
- * *Questions on the Prophets*
- * *Pleasure and Profit from the Minor Prophets*
- * *The Foreknown Cup of Christ*
- * *Character of Christ*
- * *Consummation of Christ*

Dr Desmond Ford
& Pr Roy Gee

4 Audio Cassettes
in presentation case

#2AS005

\$20.00
(PP&H included)

Or

8 CDs

#9AS009

\$35.00
(PP&H included)



Good News Unlimited

P O Box 6788 Tweed Heads Sth NSW 2486
Phone: (07) 5524 5040 Fax: (07) 5524 5900

Email: admin@goodnewsunlimited.org.au Web: www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au



God is Moving In the Land of Abraham

By David LeCompte

Special to ASSIST News Service
ERBIL, NORTHERN IRAQ (ANS)

Wednesday, October 15, 2008



From the four corners of the country they gathered in a remote location in eastern Iraq. By bus, car, airplanes, some came on foot. Believers from the cities in the north—Mosul, Dahuk, Kirkuk, Erbil, Sulimaynia. From the south—Basra, Najaf and Baghdad. Many risked their very lives to attend this yearly prayer conference organized for all Iraqi believers, Arab and Kurd.

Many told stories of heroic faith that kept them through war zones, perils from kidnapping and ethnic harassment. Others came as well, crossing great distances—visitors from Australia, England, New Zealand, Switzerland, Scotland, Uganda, Canada and the United States of America. Like on the Day of Pentecost, we all had come for one purpose, to unite together and seek God in prayer and worship for the hearts and souls of Iraq.

As the first morning's session began, the air was filled with electricity and anticipation, it was obvious something historical was taking place. Packing into the simple conference hall on the hillside, seven hundred people, many between the young age of twenty and fifty, lifted their Arabic speaking voices in unison as the worship team began to lead the gathering in songs of praise to the Lord. Songs of thanksgiving and praise rang throughout the hall, many of the young believers expressed their joy through leaping and dancing, others waved banners of worshipful expression to the King of Kings, it was a celebration of God's grace.

The heavy burdens of war and turmoil carried on the backs of the people of Iraq are being laid down and replaced with the wings of a spiritual revival not seen in modern history. Countless Iraqi's are coming to Christ daily, many of them from an Islamic background. Day after day I heard the testimonies of those who had conversions to Christ through visions and

dreams. Some had come to Christ through simply reading an Arabic Bible they had been given. Several converts were baptized in water as a public confession of their faith.

Over the past few years I had heard more and more of these conversions, now I was seeing them first hand and witnessing the revival taking place among the Middle Eastern populations, and in particular, the Iraqis.

Story after story flowed from the young Christian Iraqis. I listened to the incredible story of Fatima, a young lady who came from a very strict Sunni Muslim family in Baghdad. During Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, Fatima's father was a prominent member of the infamous Baath party until someone gave him an Arabic New Testament one day.

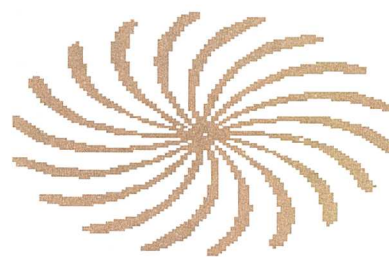
After reading about the sacrifice Jesus Christ had made for the sins of the world, her father was convicted and prayed to know this Jesus as his Saviour. For over a year, Fatima's father secretly read his Bible and began to pray for his wife and his daughters that they too would see Christ for themselves. Fatima shared that her mom and sisters noticed a drastic change in their father's life, but had no idea of what had happened. One day, Fatima saw her mother in their kitchen, crying. When asked what was troubling her, she exclaimed that she had seen a vision of a man in bright white during the night claiming he was God! Fatima's father couldn't contain his newfound faith any longer. In a gush of joy and tears, her father shared his conversion with his entire family and invited them to accept this Jesus too. Fatima beamed as she recounted how God's spirit came into their house as they too accepted Christ in to their hearts.

Eventually, more and more people became
(Continued on page 16)



Discussion Point

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations, and therefore, opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of many of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



WILL THE CHURCH SAY SORRY?

Dear Ritchie and all at GNU

We have just received our October copy of the Good News Unlimited magazine, and it has reminded me I need to send you some money for our continuing subscription of the magazine, plus we would like to give a donation.

We look forward to receiving the magazines each month and feel grateful to Ritchie and all who put so much thought and study into the articles.

We also feel sad that Dr Ford has not received any acknowledgement of the SDA's Church's wrong treatment of him in the past. Will this ever happen? I don't think so. 'The Church' is not known for its willingness to say sorry to anyone it has wronged in the past. We can only hope and pray that it will be different this time.

Dr. Ford is still having a big influence on the lives of people, via the gospel. We will keep praying for him and Gill.

Thank you all at GNU for the wonderful work you are doing. God be with you all

Y. & I. W.

P.S. I pass the magazine onto my friends when we have finished with them.

Thank you Y & I

We could not do our work without your support in both prayer and donations. Your encouragement is also inspirational.

Grace and peace to you both

Ritchie.

STOP PRESS

Dear Ritchie

My relationship with my wife has fallen on hard times. We are no

longer like a married couple, but live like two separate people in the same house (I can't call it a home anymore). My wife has let herself go and I am beginning to wonder what the point of staying together is.

Just recently, through an organisation I am involved with, I met this younger woman, and although nothing has happened between us, there is this chemistry there because we often lock eyes ...

Z.

Dear Z

I can see that this 'younger woman' has become your dream partner, but let me caution you that if you go down this path your dream will turn into a nightmare of regrets. Trust me on this. That is not the way to go!

When you got married you made a covenant with your wife, to stick with her through good times and bad. That covenant is the test of your manhood. It was a covenant until either of you died, not until your love died. That second option is the way of the world, not the way of God's people. How would you feel if Jesus gave up on you as quickly as you seem to be giving up on your wife?

Court your wife again and renew the love you once had for each other. She is worth spending time and money on. Take her out for a special evening—perhaps a meal together, followed by a nice film or concert. Buy her flowers. Plan a weekend away together. Fan the smouldering coals back into flame. Tell her how much you appreciate what she does for you. Better still, write it on a nice card and put it under her pillow. And dream of other ways

to bring romance back into your marriage.

May God be your inspiration and encouragement

Ritchie.

THE END OF THE LAW

Dear Ritchie

You put far too much emphasis on the law in some of your writings. The law belonged to the Old Covenant, not the New. Under the New Covenant 'Christ is the end of the law.'

G. W.

Dear G

Your statement echoes a belief held by many Christians, but it is quite wrong. Under the Old Covenant the law was written on tables of stone, but under the New Covenant that very same law is written in the fleshy tables of our hearts by the Holy Spirit (See Heb. 8:10). If we have the root of salvation—faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus, we will have the fruit of salvation—which is obedience to God's law through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Romans 10:4 does not say 'Christ is the end of the law,' it says 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness' (NASB). 'A man does not become righteous by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be declared righteous by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will become righteous' (Gal. 2:16 alternate translation). It is in this sense that Christ is the end of trying to earn righteousness through keeping the law. Paul confirms this in Romans 3:21-22: 'A righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known ... this righteousness from God comes



through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.' So the righteousness that saves us is not the righteousness of man but 'the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21). Those who have this root will bear its fruit, which is obedience to Christ.

Ritchie.

THINKING BEYOND

Dear Ritchie & Ron

Keep up the good work! It is wonderful to have you fellow Christians listening to God and thinking beyond 20th century culture.

Ritchie, although I may not agree with all you say, I always value your challenge to my thinking: Are my interpretations based on tradition or Scripture? And I so value that you always write in a spirit of love without being judgemental, which is how Jesus' related to people.

I was so pleased to read the April GNU magazine about new ways of understanding homosexuality that helped me make a lot more sense of what previously didn't seem to fit in with how I see God. I especially appreciated X's letter in the August magazine.

I am working, in my own way, to have the church where I worship see and preach all Scripture through the compassionate eyes of Jesus.

God bless

J. H.

Dear J

Many thanks for your affirmation. We may not always get the 'head' part of our message right, but we hope the 'heart' part never disappoints our Lord and Saviour.

Sincerely

Ritchie.

THE THIRD DAY

Dear Editor

The New Testament tells us, in several places, that Jesus rose from the dead 'on the third day.' See, for example, Matthew 16:21; 17:23. Jesus said in Matthew 27:63, 'After three days I will rise again'. In my reckoning, if Jesus was buried on Friday evening, the third day after that would be Monday, not Sunday. And

if he rose 'after' three days, that would also be Monday. How do you reconcile a Sunday resurrection with these verses?

Dear C

That is good reasoning, but it's modern Western reasoning and not Jewish reasoning of two millennia ago. Both the Jews and the Romans lacked a zero in their mathematical systems, so they counted the day on which something happened as the first day. In fact, the zero was not used as a numeral until over 600 years after Christ, when it was introduced by an Indian mathematician named Brahmagupta. Friday, therefore, was the first day, Saturday was the second day and Sunday was the third day.

Accordingly, the expression, 'after the third day' meant, 'after the start of the third day.' We know this is correct because the very next verse (Matt. 27:64) reveals that, in the thinking of the Jews, that time period only extended 'until the third day.'

Ritchie.

THE RETURN OF THE DEAD

Hi Ritchie

I have a question for you. What do you make of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 where it says, 'We do not want you to be uninformed, brethren about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.'

Is this saying that those who have fallen asleep are somehow with God?

God bless

N. J.

Hi N

At first reading it does seem that the righteous dead are with God, doesn't it? If this were the case, however, the passage would contradict itself because it says, in the following verses, that when Jesus returns the living will not go to meet him ahead of the dead, rather, the dead will rise first and then both groups will go to meet the Lord together. So if 'those who have fallen asleep in Christ' are already with the Lord, how can Paul say the living won't go to meet him before 'those who have fallen asleep in Christ.' It doesn't make sense, does it? Obviously, the dead are in their graves until they are raised to life by Jesus.

The *New International Version* translates verse 14 this way: 'We believe God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.' In other words, just as God raised Jesus from the dead, so he will bring to life all who are asleep in Jesus. They, together with the living, will be brought to the Lord in the air.

Kind regards

Ritchie.

THE NEW COVENANT

Dear GNU

I've read lots about the New Covenant, but it seems that the more I read the more confused I'm getting. To put it in a nutshell, I'm having problems trying to define exactly what it is. Could you tell me, please, in as few words as possible, what the essence of the New Covenant is?

C. B.

Dear C

The New Covenant is the reign of the Holy Spirit in us, made possible by the sacrificial death of Jesus.

Sincerely

Ritchie.

Overseas Readers

When ordering books, tapes etc., credit cards are a preferred method of payment. However, if paying by cheque please take into account the conversion rate on cheques, which is \$10.00 Australian.

Websites:

Des Ford: www.desford.org.au
GNU Aust: www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au
GNFA: www.goodnewsforadventists.com
GNU USA: www.goodnewsunlimited.org



(Continued from page 13)

God is Moving In the Land of Abraham

aware of Fatima's family's conversion to Christ. The persecution became so severe from the fundamentalist Islamic Sunni community, that they were forced to leave their home and move to a safer place in Baghdad. Even so, Fatima's family rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the Lord and continue to grow in their faith and Christian witness.

Later that afternoon, I met Fatima's father, mother and her two sisters and brother. All of them are shining examples of God's love for the Muslim world and they attend one of the fastest growing fellowships in Baghdad. They continue to share their faith openly with Muslims and anyone who will hear.

Then there was a young man from one of Iraq's most religious regions, the area of radical Shia leader Moqtada al-Sadr and the Iranian backed Mahdi army.

'I have lived in this city all my life', this young man shared. 'In fact, I lived less than 500 meters from the main mosque in town ... so close, that I knew many of the officials who worked there. Many foreigners made pilgrimages to this place to pray at the shrine. It was always bustling with thousands of visitors from around the world. I used to go to the mosque and go through all the religious practices, it was a very religious place ... revered as one of the holiest places for Shia's.

'One day I decided that all the things I had been doing to please God were futile, they were just religious acts to please my family and my friends. I didn't really believe in my heart anything I had been doing. I decided that I would stop going to prayers altogether and just not believe in anything anymore. I would become a non-believer. But I still wanted to know God.

'I had heard from the holy books and the imams that God was great, merciful and compassionate. I had heard that he was all powerful and that his will was the ultimate thing in life. I had learned to fear him and his almighty power. I knew God was great, I just didn't know him. There was an old man in our town who was a friend of our family. I respected him and I also knew that he too didn't go to the mosque to pray. He was the only one that I could tell about my struggles.

'One day I went to him and shared my despair and my disillusionment with the Islamic religion. He introduced me to a man who was translating some letters and Bible Scriptures from Arabic into the Hebrew language. How strange I thought. Seeing the look of puzzlement on my face he asked if I knew what a

Bible was. I told him that in all my years going to the mosque I had never seen a Bible, and in all the friendships I had, I was sure no one had a Bible. I asked if he could get me one and he promised he would try. Within two days he brought me a Bible in Arabic.


'As I began to open this strange book, the first words I read were from Matthew. As I began to read, the image I had of God in my mind began to become reality. I had believed God to be great and all mighty, now this book, the Bible, was confirming in my heart all that I had thought about God, he was great, but more than great. He was beyond great and I began to see that I could know him.

'Secretly, without my family or wife knowing it, I began to cry out to know the God of the Bible. I didn't know how to pray. I didn't know what to ask of God, only that he would show himself to me and teach me how to know him. I began my secret search to know the God of this book, the Bible!

'Now, my wife and I are Believers and are learning more and more about God. We have a great passion to reach our people in our home city for Jesus. None of our family know as of yet, but I desire to return to tell them and everyone who will listen to me. I have a big desire to tell many in this city how God came to me and sought me out. He came looking for me, he found me and now I want to tell others of his great power to save. I want to share the Gospel through media and film, to show God's love to my people. They will see God's great love for them if we will tell them. I know the dangers. I will probably die for my faith, but I am ready to go.'

These two stories are shining examples of what God is doing among the Iraqi people. Just a couple of years ago, there were only a few Evangelical Protestant churches known in Iraq. It is now reported that by the end of 2008, there will be over forty Evangelical churches worshipping the Lord throughout Iraq. In Baghdad, one pastor reports that there are twenty to thirty new converts added to the church every week, many coming from Muslim backgrounds, and as a result of having dreams and visions of Jesus Christ. This growth is not going without persecution however.

In one high profile case, a pastor in Baghdad was threatened with death from two members of the Mahdi army during a church service. And presently, in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, Christians are being killed for the faith if they don't convert to Islam. Many are being driven from their homes in fear.

Yet, despite these hardships and even martyrdom, God is fulfilling his promise and is pouring out his Spirit upon the sons and daughters in the Land of Abraham! 

—Published with permission from Assist News Service



‘But do you not realise ...’ (Rev 3:17 NIV)

Owen Robinson

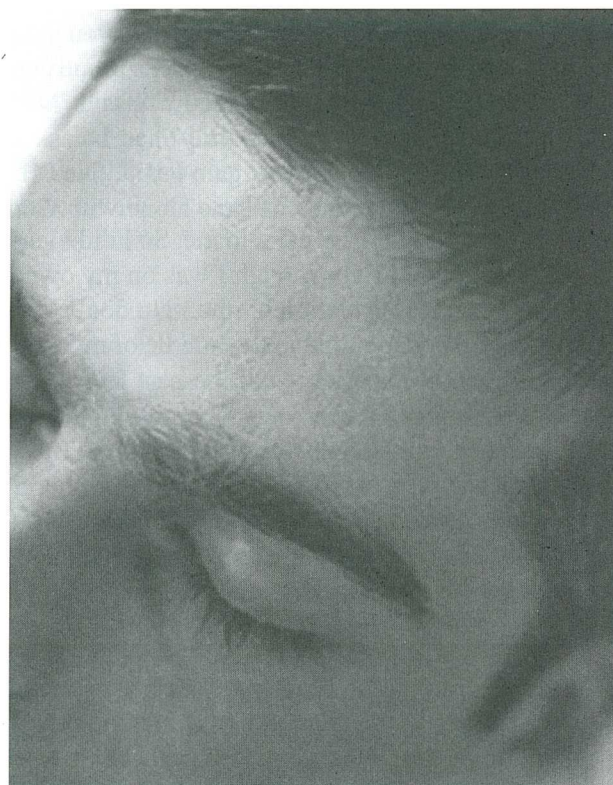
During my years of secondary teaching I would get reacquainted with an uncomfortable paradox at exam times: I knew a lot about what the students needed to know, yet I had a strong sense that a lot of the class had not done enough preparation to even realise what they didn’t know, so they could come and get some help.

I remember wanting students to come to me for assistance before the exam week but, sadly, I got used to the malaise that accompanied their false sense of security. For most students of course, this evaporates rapidly in the last few days before the exam when they actually hit the books and realise how much they don’t know. Hey, I have done this myself as a student and often. Maybe my students started to pray fervently for divine intervention at those times like I used to.

You would think I would have learned something from all this. Yet in my relationships with people and in my relationship with God, I keep hitting lots of things I didn’t realise I didn’t know. Sometimes I really hate getting a new insight about myself and what I have been doing subconsciously for a really long time. This is rarely a comfortable experience. You would think, after training as a counsellor, I’d be better at this stuff. John wrote about the problem in Rev 3:17:

You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked (Rev. 3:17 NIV).

During forty years of church life, twenty of which I worked in church school employment, my focus was rarely on looking for the things in myself I really needed to realise—as Revelation 3:17 discloses. After all, it is a pretty insulting passage! It must be written for really bad Christians. For me, during those years, getting all of my theological ducks in a row



was more important. It was about ‘having’ ‘the truth.’ Doctrines got sorted and resorted in my head. A lot of my thinking time was spent in this pursuit. I figured this must be what it means to be spiritual.

I used to quickly subdue thoughts about things not being quite right in my personal life, and concentrate on getting more of ‘the truth’. After all, what would God do to fix personal flaws and emotional issues? Surely that’s my problem to fix. And anyway, I did not really see myself as *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked*. Seriously, I was a ‘spiritual’ bloke, involved in lots of church activities, church music, committees, church boards etc. And my history was pretty good, except for a few notable areas I kept well hidden (e.g. internal sexual pollution was kept *very private*). I had never drunk alcohol nor smoked. I was Mr 105% giving time and energy to so much church music and to so many committees that I continually impressed myself. At one point I was even involved in a church plant. I didn’t realise at all that I fitted John’s *wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked* description in Revelation 3. In counselling parlance I guess it is called ‘denial’. Revelation 3 stuff was not the sort of truth I was looking for. Give me theological ‘truth’ any day!

About five years back I was at a weekend spiritual retreat where I got more truth than I was bar-



gaining on. I found myself praying with a man on the Friday night after the meeting. At the end of the prayer the guy I was with looked up and said something like this: 'Owen. I think God is showing me that you have a problem with pride. You don't look like a proud person. Do you know what that is about?' I said 'No.' He offered to pray again so we did. Then he asked me if it was any clearer to me. Again I said, 'No.' He encouraged me to spend some time alone with God outside, asking God to reveal it to me. So I did—and he did. Boy did he! Even though I was on my own I blurted out, as the revelation hit me, 'No don't let it be that.' God took me right to the middle of my most intensely painful experiences of the past few years, and I wept for some time.

I needed to ask God's forgiveness for the way I had acted out of pride. So I did. I had left church employment under a cloud, largely of my own making. My stubbornness and determined efforts to take on a few people and try to win a fight against them—

John tells us how to get things fixed up with God's help in Revelation 3:18-19.

I advise you to buy gold from me—gold that has been purified by fire. Then you will be rich. And also buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness. And buy ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see. I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love. Be diligent and turn from your indifference. (NLT)

This passage had troubled me for years. Every time I had thought about this 'gold' business I had given up trying to understand it. I figured there is nothing of value I can exchange with God to buy anything from him. After all, what God sees as gold must be really expensive. But, just when I needed it, God led a group of us to a new understanding of this passage as we got together one Friday night to spend time with him. To buy something involves a transaction. I have nothing of real value to buy with, yet he still seems to want an exchange. Then I realised that's the whole point. God

To buy something involves a transaction. I have nothing of real value to buy with, yet he still seems to want an exchange. Then I realised that's the whole point. God wants an exchange, but who said it has to be something of equal value. He wants to exchange my garbage for what is of value to him. This is an exchange that happens because of his grace.

a fight I had badly wanted to win—had ended badly and my pride had been hurt deeply. I was emotionally and spiritually burned out and struggled through the next two years while requalifying with a social-work degree. And yet I still didn't really realise how deep the roots of pride were in my life.

A further four years went by before God showed me there really was a spirit of pride at work in me and he then showed me how to get rid of it. In the interim I had laboured under the illusion that the worst thing about pride was the smugness that would show sometimes—and I tried pretty hard to not show that. Yes pride even kept me doing image management about my pride, hiding and avoiding the problem.

Once God healed me of that spirit of pride, denial started to evaporate. The moments of recognition of the truth about me came more and often. In fact, it got to the point it was almost overwhelming sometimes. I wanted to get fixed now that I could see how much I needed it. I realised I do not have enough life-times to grow through conventional therapy, or via persistent effort to change all the things that were coming up. I'm so grateful God showed me what to do with all the stuff that was coming to the surface.

wants an exchange, but who said it has to be something of equal value. He wants to exchange my garbage for what is of value to him. This is an exchange that happens because of *his grace*.

So, one day when I was being 'still' with God, yet feeling really anxious about a relationship issue, I started praying, 'Father, please exchange this hateful thing in me with what Jesus paid for when he died.' In about five seconds the tension in the centre of my chest decreased markedly. As I tried this again with lots of other things, over the next few days, something similar happened each time. I started swapping my negative attitudes and character weaknesses for whatever Jesus paid for. After all, how would I know what Jesus would want to put in their place? I figure it's best to leave it up to him to choose what's good for me so 'what ever' became a key feature of these prayers. This new approach to the truth about myself was so much easier than trying to do self-therapy in my head. The hard work was over!

So the buying of Jesus' gold made more sense at last. What about the next part of Revelation 3:18? '... *buy white garments so you will not be shamed by your nakedness.*' Shame is not so much about what we have done, it is about who we are—our identity. It seems Revelation 3:18 is suggesting we



can swap what shames our very identity for the pure white covering Jesus purchased for us. The importance of this is not to be underestimated. When we have agreed with things the enemy would like us to think about ourselves, we give him power over our feelings and reactions to many situations. For instance, if I agree that 'I'm never good enough' I will tend to act out of that conclusion with all-or-nothing behaviour, and my feelings will be wounded deeply by it too. I'll either exhaust myself trying harder to be perfect and do it *all* or I'll crash and give up and do *nothing*. Either way the enemy defeats me.

One negative identity image of ourselves can do us a lot of damage. And I believe they all have their origin with the enemy. In Genesis 3, all he did was keep talking until Adam and Eve started to agree with him. That's still the enemy's primary activity. John 8:44-45 speaks of the devil as:

'... not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.' (NIV)

Negative identity images of ourselves are lies of the enemy but often feel true: 'I'm no good'; 'I'm a failure'; 'I'm powerless'; 'I'm beyond hope'; 'I have no choice but to be afraid of x' (substitute your own fears for x); 'I'm only ever going to be abandoned, unloved and unwanted'; 'I'm tainted for life by what happened'; 'I'm to blame'; 'I'm not important and what I feel, think and say are not important'. Revelation 3:18 is asking us to ask the Lord to forgive us for agreeing with all these dark concepts of who we are (all lies of the enemy), and to exchange


them for our true identity, which is not as we see ourselves, but as the Lord sees us.

Bear in mind that if you have pride in your life, as I have had, you might need to ask God for *ointment for your eyes so you will be able to see*. Try this first and God may also reveal other issues in your life that he wants to heal. Pride prevents us from realising that we are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked, with the result, that we don't seek God for the better stuff.

Practical Application: Making it real

1. Ask the Lord to show you a lie of the enemy you have agreed with, and then ask forgiveness for making that agreement with the enemy. After that, ask God to reveal *how he sees you*.

2. Try this faith experiment: Over the next four weeks pray a prayer of exchange every day for each bad thing you see in your life. Freely give each of them up to the Lord and notice what he gives you in exchange. At the end of four weeks observe what changes have taken place in your thinking and feelings.

3. If you want to take it to another level, ask God to reveal what has been spiritually affecting your family. Pray something like this, 'Father, please forgive our family line for imparting the belief that *we are just never good enough*, and please exchange this for what Jesus paid for when he died. Then notice how your children start to think and behave differently. 

—The writer, Owen Robinson, is a social worker working for the Department of Health in Perth in community mental health. He also maintains a private counselling practice.

Tax Deductibility for New Zealand Donors to Good News Unlimited (NZ)

When the New Zealand government decided to refund the tax on all donations (up to the level of a person's income) which had been given to approved charitable organizations with donee status, it was decided to establish a New Zealand Branch of GNU, and apply for this charitable and donee status. After consideration we received registration, enabling us to issue receipts so that Inland Revenue would give donors one third of their donations back.

Donations to Good News Unlimited (NZ)

F & K Burling,
52 Kohekohe Street, New Lynn, Waitakere, New Zealand. 0060

Phone: 98270070

Bank Account: Good News Unlimited, 12-3023-0378560-000
ASB Bank, Henderson branch



Answer to RIDDLE on page 4 The River Jordan.



Good News Unlimited

PRINT POST APPROVED - PP63221900015
May be opened for inspection.

THERE'S BEEN A CHANGE ...

To ensure regular copies of *Good News Unlimited* please advise of any change of address.
Return old label and your new address details to:
Good News Unlimited
PO Box 6788
SOUTH TWEED HEADS NSW 2486



The very first Christmas revealed the face of God—it was a human face. 'When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of slave, became human! Having become human he stayed human' (Philippians 2:6-7 MB)

PRINT
POST
63221900015

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

Subscription is free on request. As a guide for those who wish to assist this ministry, each magazine costs at least \$32.50 per annum, postage included. Gift subscriptions are invited, either free or financed.

GOOD NEWS UNLIMITED magazine is printed by Good News Unlimited, a non profit Christian resource organisation.

www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au